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ABSTRACT

Community Language Learning (CLL) is a humanistic approach to learning which emphasizes the learner and learning rather than the teacher and teaching. In some situations where the teacher is not fluent in the various languages spoken by the students, such as in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom, advanced students may serve as counselors to beginners. An experiment that used this approach generated both positive and negative response, but it was generally agreed that this kind of learning situation, particularly when carried out in the form of small group discussions, fosters a comfortable, unthreatened environment which is beneficial to learning. In a "counselearning" atmosphere, students should feel able to discuss their feelings toward the target language, learning activities, and other factors outside the classroom. When students begin to bring to the classroom their own problems and ideas, on their own initiative, the emphasis will have been shifted successfully from the teacher to the learner. (AM)

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COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING AND COUNSELING-LEARNING

Lillian Soga

Since I have had first-hand experience practicing Swahili with Community Language Learning (CLL) models this year at the University of Michigan Language Institute and also experimenting with CLL in English Language Training Department (ELT) classes at Vancouver Community College's King Edward Campus, I think that CLL is very important for learning English as an additional language. We need the more wholistic and humanistic approach to language learning which CLL provides. As a viable alternative to handing out grammar exercises, putting students through the paces of structure drills and laying on situational topics devised primarily by the teacher, CLL emphasizes the importance of the learners and learning rather than the teacher and teaching.

Charles Curran of Loyola University, Chicago, developed CLL from his research in group dynamics because of his own problems in second language learning. His premise is that we must consider the language learner as a whole person with feelings and soma (physical manifestations of emotional strain e.g., perspiring, shaking, quivering mouth) as well as intellect. Since most of our language teaching stresses cognition and behavioral objectives without considering the hidden emotional conflicts of anxiety, hostility and anger, we often face situations which appear irrational and even overwhelming as adults struggle to learn a new language. Brought up in a society which emphasizes good manners, teachers are sometimes confused and incapable of coping with an adult's child-like behavior such as overt refusal to participate or silent refusal to answer.

However, according to Curran, these conflicts should be considered part of second language learning as a student moves back and forth through five stages:

I. Embryo = learner completely dependent on knower.

II. Self-Assertion = learner trying remembered words with help.

III. Birth = learner trying to give entire simple and possibly imperfect structure without help.

IV. Reversal = learner beginning to feel like a knower but still making mistakes.

V. Independent = learner becoming fairly fluent but accepting suggestions on idioms and vocabulary.

In the learning process constructive anger is essential and aggression natural, especially as learners begin to assert themselves and move toward the birth stage and back and forth between stages to eventual independence. Therefore, a teacher should not feel intimidated or personally insulted by these expressions of conflict but instead allow the adult learner to express feelings in a counseling-learning situation at the time the problem is occurring or at a designated time during or after the class period.

In a beginning class, learners are in the embryo stage and completely dependent; therefore, the teacher often dominates by preparing materials for the learners and then expecting them to accept what the teacher thinks they should learn. To prevent this from happening, CLL models allow four to six learners, sitting around a tape recorder, to develop a conversation topic of their own choice. The knower/counselor remains behind the group circle as each learner is encouraged to contribute to the free conversation using his native language. This is then changed into the target language by the knower, who gives the sentence or phrase to the learner in a soft, non-judgmental tone of voice, but loud enough for all to hear. The learner then repeats the target sentence on the tape recorder. In this way the topic of the conversation emerges from the learners along with various structures, while the knower becomes only a tool or resource without interjecting any personal ideas into the group or community. This conversational session lasts for about ten minutes at first but can be lengthened in later sessions as learners move from Stage I and become more assertive by trying words or parts of sentences without the knower's help. When the session with language which Stevick calls "investment" finishes (p. 126), the learn-

ers have a feedback period of reflection to react both objectively and subjectively to what they have contributed to the session and how they feel about the language experience. At this time negative as well as positive feelings due to previous experiences with the particular language, prejudices towards speakers of the target language, frustrations during the current learning situation, or pressures from outside the learning environment can be voiced. These conflicts in the traditional classroom are usually ignored and thus, unfortunately, remain hidden.

In following class sessions grammatical structures from the taped conversation can be presented for oral and reading practice in printed form, on the overhead projector, or through chromacord exercises developed by Tranel (p. 157). Since La Forge also describes his experiments at the University of Michigan and in Japan in Research Profiles with Community Language Learning, I feel it is unnecessary to detail further explanations of CLL in this brief paper except to point out that Curran (1976) and Stevick (1976) also provide valuable theory and practical suggestions for teachers to use as a guide to CL/CLL.

Of course, now the big question is how can we adapt and use CLL in our own multicultural, multinational classes since the teachers do not have the multilingual expertise to know all of the first languages of their students. On the other hand, in any one ELT class at King Edward Campus we often find some range of difference in the oral ability of students from one native language background, so they tend to informally assist each other with vocabulary items. Therefore, it is possible for the more knowledgeable students to become counselors to those less knowledgeable on a more planned basis during the CLL conversational or investment session around the tape recorder.

In May 1976 at King Edward Campus in cooperation with Sharon Yoneda, I had a chance to experiment with an adult beginners level class during two twenty-minute sessions with CLL. My advanced students were taken to a class of twenty-two beginners who had had about four months of English in our program. They paired off by native language, and advanced

students became the knower-counselors to the beginners who were put into five native language groups of four each and one group of two learners with one knower. Since this was their first experience and there was much confusion with all learners participating, we did not record the sessions for later replay.

The groups were told to either practice a conversation which they had heard previously or have a conversation on some topic of their own. In most groups the learners and knowers introduced themselves first and then began practicing. Two groups were very enthusiastic and developed situations such as trying to buy a particular item because they had a practical need outside of class. The knowers provided vocabulary items or particularly difficult structures which the learners could not say. One group practiced familiar conversations to which they had been exposed previously in class but did not quite understand or were unable to produce. Another group had difficulty talking and needed a great deal of encouragement and reinforcement from the knowers and the two teacher/resource experts. The fifth group often got bogged down in asking for grammatical points and explanations rather than producing a conversation, so they constantly needed reminding of the purpose of the community language learning session. The diversified ways in which learners attempt to gain language proficiency could be identified quickly as well as problems certain learners had. Obviously, some felt they could not practice until they had had certain grammatical points clarified.

Unfortunately, we were unable to conduct a formal native language feedback-counseling session with the beginners because we teachers did not have ability in all the native languages. However, stopping the session was very difficult because most of the groups preferred to continue although it was almost the end of the class period when usually they are so tired and anxious to go home. Then, as the advanced class knowers were leaving, several beginners asked when we would come to help them again, so I assumed that they felt CLL filled a need and created an important learning climate which was more stimulating than tiring.

The advanced class feedback-counseling session was carried out later in our own classroom. Two or three fast-learning students felt it was a waste of their precious learning time although they mentioned that some beginning students had indicated appreciation to them in their native language. Later, I thought it might be possible to record the feedback session in the native language and ask teachers who know the language to transcribe it.

Other slower advanced students realized they had picked up new vocabulary, become more aware of English syntax and consequently had a better understanding of basic grammar points which had never before become part of their own English language self.

The final unanimous opinion was that great benefit could be gained from CLL which creates a secure environment with a warm, friendly and understanding atmosphere so learners feel comfortable and unthreatened. As a matter of fact, many students wanted a group of more advanced knowers to come to our class to help them learn, using the same kind of CLL model.

During the second CLL session with the beginners, we used both classrooms in order to reduce noise and confusion. This time there was little hesitation in conversing as they quickly formed groups and participated enthusiastically in conversations. I firmly believe along with the proponents of CLL that the importance of unthreatening and non-judgmental language and reflection sessions must be seriously considered if we want the language to truly germinate, bud and flower into each learner's English language self.

Actually, in practice many teachers already encourage fast learners to assist slower ones in small group activities, thereby informally creating a community spirit and secure learning environment. (See other articles in this publication.) However, if we consider our philosophy of education to be that the learner is a unique individual with unique needs, we should begin to focus entirely on the learner and his/her learning rather than on our teaching, and allow the learner to produce, the class exercises to flow from that production, and the teaching to remain in the

background and subjugated to learning.

Of course, there are still many problems arising from outside the classroom which can be a hindrance to community learning. For example, in our ELT Department, students, who attain a certain level of proficiency, progress every two months to the next class level, while others, not gaining the required language ability, remain. This often builds resentment because severed friendships, adjustments to new teachers, and reorganization and recreation of the class community disrupt learning. If, as many teachers have mentioned, two weeks or more are required for them to "get to know" the new class, think what loyalty conflicts, negative feelings and barriers to learning the students must have. Sometimes, certain students react with anti-social behavioral patterns in the new class or repeatedly ask to return to the old class and friends there.

At this point, the informal counseling session of C-L, which in effect is the teacher listening to student feelings and reactions, is necessary because if anxiety, hostility and anger persist, students might never advance from Stage III to Stage V in language development but instead remain frustrated and defeated by the system.

I can hear some teachers say now that we should be in class only to teach language and not to worry about the feelings of a student, but at the same time these teachers will admit that their own feelings on a particular day influence how they teach. Surely then, learners' feelings affect how they learn!

In large classes using various methods and techniques, teachers find it difficult to give an equal amount of individualized attention to each student as a whole person with cognitive, affective and somatic domains. The tendency is to concentrate on the cognitive and teach as if each student were a vessel to pour English into without consideration for what the individual wants, why he or she came, and where she or he is at, academically and psychologically, in the five stages of learning.

There is a possibility that no learning or even negative learning may take place if teachers treat adults as children, with rewards and punishments, or neglect individual needs, feelings and aspirations

Malcolm Knowles, an adult educator well-known for his andragogical theories, says "Adults tend to resist learning under conditions that are incongruent with their self-concept as autonomous individuals." (1970, p. 40).

My recent experience with "Counselearning" in an advanced ELT class, whose members were fairly fluent and therefore able and willing to express feelings in English, revealed that they, as learners, felt positively and negatively towards materials being studied. One student even mentioned his own feeling of "melancholy" was hindering his thinking ability on a particular day. The fact that he could share this feeling seemed to help lessen its grip, so he was then able to participate more fully in the class community. As the students became more comfortable and unthreatened in expressing how they felt toward what the class was doing, they became freer in sharing language frustrations faced outside the classroom. Certain very quiet and seemingly shy students began to stay after class to talk individually about problems with English at work or to ask for extra help with certain points that were confusing in class. So if a teacher is open and non-defensive, the students will also become more open and free to express themselves.

With my present smaller class I am able to carry counselearning farther by designing individualized exercises to strengthen weak grammar areas found in their written and spoken English and afterward by having feedback-counseling sessions to see if the exercises were valuable and how we might use them more effectively for maximum learning. We also have many discussions arising from the weekly five to ten minute talk on a topic of an individual student's choice, which is announced to the class one or two days previously. That also gives me time to find appropriate reading and writing material related to the topic. After three weeks, students have begun to bring to class articles, essays and books which they had found either too difficult to read on their own or so full of interesting ideas that they wanted to share them. Since everyone has been contributing to the community learning, the class has become "ours" rather than "mine." My own material that I had prepared previously is extraneous and no longer useful.

La Forge believes that "the living experience of learning is at the heart of CLL activity" (p. 7) and goes a step farther to conclude:

> "If further research upholds the tentative conclusions ..., then CLL will eventually cause a revolution in psychological research methodology (Experimental Psychology), and perhaps in the field of the Philosophy of Science." (p. 58)

Perhaps other teachers have used or experimented with CL/CLL and would like to contact me and exchange practical ideas, problems and theories. At the Spring 1976 TEAL Annual Convention, a workshop on CLL was given, and hopefully we will continue to have more seminars and discussions on this important development in language learning. After all, Counseling-Learning, already used in other subject areas, is a whole-person philosophy for a life of learning.

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